

Testimony of Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Goode, Sr.

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To

**The Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy
And Human Resources, House of Representatives**

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I am W. Wilson Goode, Sr., Senior Advisor on Faith-Based Initiatives for Public/Private Ventures (P/PV). I come to this job after more than 40 years of active community and government service: I served for 10 years as the head of a local civic/neighborhood organization. I have also served as both Mayor and City Manager of Philadelphia. Most importantly, I have been a member of the same congregation for 50 years. So I come with a fair amount of experience

I come as someone who supports, without apology, Faith-Based Programs. I believe that allowing Faith-Based Institutions to compete with others will do much to increase the quality of services in the community.

Let me add that I know firsthand the value of faith-based institutions being allowed to compete for government contracts and services. From 1966 to 1978, I worked with 50 faith-based organizations that utilized various housing programs to construct over 2,000 housing units for low and moderate-income families. As Mayor of Philadelphia from 1984 to 1992, I allowed faith-based organizations to compete for various social service contracts. These faith-based groups received more than \$40 million annually. I have now put all my experience to work in the

area of faith-based initiatives. I have done so because I believe it is the best hope for solving many of the social problems facing our urban and rural areas.

It is possible for one to look at the current situation and simply throw in the towel. It would be easy to believe that nothing is working; failures are outnumbering the successes by wide margins. Much of the investments in programs for children and youth have not yielded the kind of results expected. Government and Foundation founders have become wary of these programs. Funding has diminished and there may be those who are about to wave the white surrender flag. Well, put away that surrender flag. There are still programs worth funding. There are yet needs that must be met. There are challenges that must be confronted. Let me suggest an approach that I believe will work. Many of the problems and challenges are really centered on a very definable group of children and youth. We know that these children and youth live in poverty, are being raised in single parent households, and probably have or have had one or both parents in jail. In fact there are 7.3 million children that on any given day have one or both parents either in jail or in some form of state or federal supervision. These children and youth are not easily identifiable because we often don't collect enough information about them. Schools and other government agencies don't know whether a child has one or both parents in jail. They may know about the family composition and income but this information cannot be shared with other agencies that need it in order to be of assistance.

Let me discuss with you one program, which I believe makes the point that I am attempting to make. The program is called AMACHI. It is a program designed to find volunteer mentors for children of incarcerated parents. In AMACHI, we identified a very specific group of children. Those who have or have had a parent in

jail. We don't know nearly as much as we need to know about these children. But what we know suggests they are the most at risk population in society. According to a report issued by the U.S. Senate 70% of these children will follow their parents to jail. Yes, on any given day about 5 million children are at risk of going to jail because they had one or both parents in jail. Indeed, two-thirds of the children and youth now in juvenile detention have or have had one or both parents in jail. These children are six-times more likely than other children to be absent from school, to drop out of school, to sell drugs, to murder or be murdered.

We need to know more about these children and we need to verify by additional research the information we already have.

However, based upon what we know, we structured a program to respond to this very specific population of children and youth.

We brought together the religious and secular sectors to join forces to help these children and youth. Joining forces were Public / Private Ventures, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Center for Religion and Urban Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania, and fifty Local Congregations in Philadelphia.

The Local Congregations provided more than 550 volunteers who assisted more than 700 children and youth over three years. Big Brothers Big Sisters provided it's brand of community based mentoring. This program now is being replicated in at least 100 cities and 37 states around the country.

What's new about this program is not only its focus, but also the partnerships that seek to build on the strengths of the respective organizations. The local congregations have been and are untapped resources to confront the many

challenges facing neighborhoods and communities across the country. Moreover, these congregations are willing to partner with other viable organizations to help alleviate the problems of children and youth in their own neighborhoods.

The AMACHI Program is a very focused program. It does not seek to deal with all the problems facing these children and youth. It is a mentoring program that asks a volunteer to spend at least one hour, once per week for at least one year with a child of an incarcerated parent. We know from research that mentoring is a proven tool of intervention. We believe that targeting this group of children and youth can change neighborhoods and communities across the country.

What I am really suggesting here is more targeting of dollars to specific population of children and youth. If we target and add performance measures along with outcome expectations, there is no reason we cannot make significant changes in the problems.

Amachi is a straightforward and highly focused program: through a partnership of secular and faith-based institutions, volunteers recruited from congregations mentor children of prisoners. The model was developed from research findings on the benefits of mentoring and the potential of inner-city congregations to address some of the significant challenges facing their communities—including findings about both practices that work and those that are less likely to be successful.

Research on mentoring has shown that positive outcomes occur only when matches meet regularly for at least a year and that solid program infrastructure is necessary for this to occur. Strong mentoring relationships do not happen automatically. Well-planned, well-run programs—programs that carefully screen,

train, monitor, and support mentors so the matches are able to develop and endure—have positive effects. However, poorly implemented mentoring programs are less likely to produce such benefits.ⁱ

Similarly, while inner-city congregations are potentially vital sources of volunteers who can help bring about positive changes in their communities, their involvement will not happen automatically. Members of those congregations respond to the leadership of their pastors. If the leadership is passive concerning community involvement, the congregation will be passive as well. However, if the leadership is committed—if it sees the issue being addressed as meaningful and directly connected to the church's mission, and conveys that message to the congregation—members will respond.ⁱⁱ

THE MODEL

Drawing on research on effective practices, the Amachi model was intended to engage congregations, take advantage of each partner's strengths, and lead to large numbers of successful mentoring relationships. The model included clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the partners; a staffing configuration that supported each partner and contributed to the goals of the overall partnership; and a data-collection system for monitoring the matches and ensuring accountability.

The Partners

The Amachi model required an organization to implement and oversee the project. In Philadelphia, P/PV took that role. It was responsible for administrative oversight and financial management, as well as for recruiting congregations and

children. The organization also collected and analyzed the data used to monitor the matches and gauge the overall progress of Amachi, and worked with the key partners to address the inevitable problems that arise during start-up of a new project. Those partners were the congregations and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

The Congregations

Congregations are partners in Amachi, not just sources of volunteers. The presence of Amachi in a church reflects the pastor and congregation's conviction that the project is very much a part of their mission in the world.

Each participating church committed to recruiting ten volunteers from its congregation, who would meet at least one hour a week for a year with a child of a current or former prisoner. Each church was also responsible for collecting and submitting monthly data on how often those matches were meeting. Beyond that, however, congregations were expected to nurture and support the volunteers, and to step in if they were not meeting their commitment. To that end, each pastor named a Church Volunteer Coordinator (CVC), who was responsible for overseeing and coordinating Amachi within the congregation. Many of the CVCs had previously served as a volunteer youth director or in a similar role at the church. They generally checked with mentors on a weekly basis, either through regularly scheduled meetings, phone calls, or informal conversations after Sunday. Mentoring children of prisoner programs are now in 37 states and 105 cities. About one-third are called AMACHI. The AMACHI Model has influenced all.

It is clear to me that Faith-Based programs are a vital part of solving the social ills facing many communities. I commend to you this vital resource.

ⁱ Cynthia L. Sipe. 1996. *Mentoring: A Synthesis of P/PV's Research: 1988-1995*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

ⁱⁱ Rev. W. Wilson Goode, Sr. *From Clubhouse To Lighthouse: A Dialogical Approach To Congregational Transformation*. May 2000, Doctoral Dissertation. Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary.